

The Spoils System

By Cathy Pearl

Andrew Jackson was elected president in 1828. He knew that the people wanted change. To start with, he fired many of the employees that had been working for the government. Many of these people did well at their jobs. Jackson didn't care. He only wanted people who supported him to work for him.

Many of the people who liked Jackson wanted a job. Many of them got one. Jackson gave jobs to many people who had helped him win the election. Not all of these men could do the jobs that were given to them.

This was called the spoils system. It meant that government jobs were given to people that supported you. People who liked Jackson had a better chance of good jobs.

Because most of the men that Jackson hired couldn't do the jobs, he couldn't get help from them. Only his Secretary of State had the skills to do the job. Instead, Jackson would meet with other people to discuss any problems that he had. The men he met with were called the "kitchen cabinet."

The problems with the spoils system grew after Andrew Jackson. Each time a new president was elected, many people would go to Washington. They would ask for jobs.

Many of them still could not do the jobs that were given to them. Some would steal money. In New York, there was a man who was given the job of court reporter. But he couldn't read or write which made the job impossible for him to do.

Many people in the United States started to demand a change. In 1877, change began to come. A new president, Rutherford B. Hayes, started to investigate people and offices. One place was a customhouse in New York. He found out that many people there earned a lot of money for not doing anything.

Hayes fired two officials from the customhouse. Republican leaders did not like this. Hayes wasn't worried. He continued to fight against the spoils system while he was in office.

One of the officials fired was Chester Arthur. Arthur would run for vice president and take the office. James Garfield was president. He had been elected in 1881. Again, many people came and asked him for a job. But Garfield did not hand out jobs to people he liked. He thought that people who had the ability to do the jobs should get them.

In July, a person who Garfield did not give a job to shot the president. Garfield died two months after that. To everyone's shock, Arthur became president. He was the man who had been fired by Hayes a few years earlier. Most people thought he would support the spoils system. They were wrong.

Arthur worked with Congress to change the spoils system. In 1883, Congress passed the Pendleton Act. It started the Civil Service Commission. Their goal was to give jobs to people who deserved them. It gives exams for a federal job. People who score highest on the test earn the jobs.

In the beginning, there weren't many jobs that were controlled by the Commission. But by 1900, almost forty percent of federal jobs were given this way.

Today, Civil Service is still used. There are many jobs where exams are required. It has helped protect both employees and employers. It makes sure that people can do the jobs that are given to them.



Name _____



Date _____

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Questions

_____ 1. Who started the spoils system?

- A. Andrew Jackson
- B. Rutherford B. Hayes
- C. James Garfield

_____ 2. What happened to James Garfield?

- A. He was assassinated.
- B. He retired.
- C. He quit.

3. What was passed in 1883?

_____ 4. What was the name for the men Andrew Jackson met with?

- A. Spoils system
- B. Kitchen cabinet
- C. Civil Service

_____ 5. By 1900, the Civil Service had control of how many government jobs?

- A. Fifty percent
- B. Four percent
- C. Forty percent

_____ 6. Chester Arthur supported the spoils system when he was president.

- A. False
- B. True

Do you think the spoils system was fair? Why or why not?



Date _____

How do you think a person should be hired for a job? What is the best way to pick the most qualified person?

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